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## BACKGROUNDS FOR A SURVEY COURSE

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The study of the history of English literature as a part of the high-school course seems today to be a popular subject for attack. The charge is often made, and perhaps truly, that it still degenerates into the study of a textbook *about* literature; or that, at its best, it is a rather poor course in history, not in literature. Or again, it is alleged that the classics chosen lie outside the normal interests of high-school students, and that the study of samples kills all desire for more while fostering the habit of hasty generalization from insufficient data. The radicals go further, and recommend the abandonment of all literature antedating our own generation.

I do not claim that the plan I am offering will obviate these objections. It has, in fact, no supernatural qualities. The forming of a taste for literature, the acquisition of the power to read it intelligently, and the development of a perception in it of something vital and intimately related to the individual and national life are processes that must always be slow, and apparently uncertain. Probably some students in high school are too immature to make even a beginning on a historical survey; but others are ready, and to defer means forever to deny the opportunity.

The plan which follows is one I have been using, with variations, for a number of years; it may be interesting to some; it is not intended as a Procrustean rack for anyone's teaching. My object is to condense the historical part of the course to the smallest possible compass, emphasizing only a few outstanding features, and allowing the literature itself to illustrate and supplement these. Whatever its faults, I believe this plan does make some dents in the student's mind.

The first great difficulty in a course chronologically arranged is that the earlier periods are in a forbidding language and very remote from the student's immediate experiences. In some schools,

therefore, everything preceding the Elizabethan age is omitted. Whether this is the course to follow depends upon how much time is at command, and upon the individual class and teacher who have been elected to co-operate. If there is time, it often proves fruitful to spend four or five days reading aloud a simple translation of *Beowulf*, with the omission of some of the digressive episodes. The eye-minded may follow the reading with books, if they are available. With occasional pauses for discussion, this reading puts the student in possession of as much of the story, the institutions, characters, ideals, and racial traits embodied in the poem as he can use. But to hand the book over to him to read for himself too often makes his first plunge a fatal chill. The language, even in translation, is too much cumbered by the Saxon habit of reiterating apposition; the names are harsh and strange; the opening genealogy is confusing; the digressions too numerous. All this can be relieved, by the familiar reader, through modulation of the voice, explanation, discussion, and judicious cutting.

When one goes on to Chaucer, the desideratum is a good prose translation of the prologue, perhaps accompanied by the text, one or two of the *Canterbury Tales*, and a similar translation of the prologue to *Piers Plowman*, with a summary of the story of the "A" version. Percy Mackaye has provided the Chaucer, but the book is expensive. There is also a cheap, but not very satisfactory, Everyman translation of *Piers Plowman*. Reading aloud may be here again the only recourse. If so, there must be frequent discussion. Pupils enjoy finding modern parallels for Chaucer's types, or discussing some such question as this: Is petty graft as common today as in the fourteenth century.

But if all this goes on only in class, what is the student to do meantime? It is almost fatal to leave him wholly unoccupied during the beginning weeks. Let him read a considerable number of ballads, and perhaps one mystery or morality play. His notes may be called for from time to time, if the teacher desires. At the end of the two weeks of reading, a day or two of brisk discussion will serve to bring this work into focus with the rest. Then one may say: "Your aeroplane got out of order; you were forced to descend, and were surprised to find yourself in the fourteenth

century; describe the life in that picturesque period." A comparison with Russia or with Mexico sometimes offers tempting opportunities.

When we reach the time of Shakespeare, the language is no longer an embarrassment. If sometimes quaint, even difficult, it is not prohibitive. From this point the teacher may retire from the position of medium to that of friendly adviser, and let the pupil do his own exploring. The following is the itinerary for a week's trip in Elizabethan England. We visit the streets, the shops, the court, the theaters and other places of amusement, hear some thrilling tales of adventure, meet some well-known characters, and get inklings of the main problems of the day. Each pupil prepares one reading assignment and presents it in detail, while the others take notes and ask questions.

*General references:*

Boynton: *London in English Literature*, pp. 37-45.

Guest: *Handbook of English History*, chaps. xlv, xlv (for non-history students)

Greene: *Short History of the English People*, chap. vii

"Elizabeth," sec. III, pp. 369-76

"Spain and the Armada," sec. VI, pp. 411-20

"The Renaissance," sec. VIII, pp. 420-22

"The Puritans," sec. VIII, pp. 460-64, 467-69

*The streets, houses, dress, food, furniture:*

Streets:

Boynton: *London in English Literature*, pp. 49-55

Scott: *Fortunes of Nigel*, chap. i, pars. 5-7, 17 ff.

Boynton: (Thames, London Bridge, etc.) pp. 57-61

Houses:

Trail: *Social England*, Vol. III, pp. 392-97

More: *Utopia* (Burt ed.), pp. 231-33

Bacon: *Essays*, "Of Buildings," "Of Gardens"

Latimer: *Sermons*, "First Sermon before Edward VI, 1549" (Everyman ed.), p. 85

Dress:

Greene: *Short History*, pp. 396-98

Trail: *Social England*, Vol. III, pp. 385-90

*Inns:*

Boynton: *London in English Literature*, pp. 45-48

(At the inns we will suppose we hear told the following tales of adventure.)

Tales of Adventure:

Lang: *Social England Illustrated*, pp. 139 ff.

Kemp: *Nine Days Wonder*, pp. 101 ff. "The Memorable Adventure of William Ferris"

Raleigh, W.: *The Last Fight of the Revenge* (Arber reprint)

Hakluyt: *Voyages of the English Nation* (Everyman ed.), Vol. I, pp. 411-18, 437, Anthonie Jenkinson in Russia; Vol. VIII, "Sir Francis Drake's Circumnavigation," from Chile until Drake leaves the Pacific Coast; and "Last Voyage of Sir Humphrey Gilbert," the loss of the Admiral and the death of Sir Humphrey

Arber, E.: *An Introductory Sketch to the Martin Marprelate Controversy*, pp. 57-60, 68-71, 126-28, the story of John Penry. (This material on Penry is difficult; a student with considerable enthusiasm for history should be chosen and the teacher should confer and assist in the preparation.)

The court:

The palace:

Boynton, pp. 55-57

Royal amusements:

Cavendish: *Life of Wolsey*, pp. 31-37 (Temple ed.)

Scott: *Kenilworth*, chap. 30, last half-dozen pages; chap. 37, last half-dozen pages; chap. 30, first four pages

Learning:

Ascham, *Schoolmaster*, pp. 66-67, Elizabeth; 39-41, Lady Jane Grey

Court characters:

Elias: *In Tudor Times*, Burleigh, Sidney, Leicester, Raleigh

Sports, Spectacles, Punishments:

Kemp: *Nine Days Wonder*, second day

More: *Utopia*, 171-80, thieving, enclosure, death penalties

Kemp's and Ferris' accounts, especially reception in various towns

Lang: *Social England Illustrated*, pp. 390 ff., "King James' Declaration Concerning Lawful Sports"

Trail: *Social England*, Vol. III, pp. 37-45

The theater:

Boynton, pp. 37-45

Taine: *History of English Literature*, Vol. I, Bk. II, Chap. ii, sec. 1.

Hinchman: *English and American Literature*, two pictures, pp. 104, 112, and text, pp. 110-16.

*Oxford Treasury of English Literature*, Vol. I, pp. 399 ff., Gallant at a Play from Dekker: *Gull's Hornbook*

To this, pictorial and musical material may be added.

One then proceeds to see three or four plays, if time permits. The more vividly they are visualized the better.

If Hamlet is read last, both teacher and class are happy in possessing perhaps the finest social picture of Elizabethan England as a point of departure for approaching Milton. Hamlet himself is an almost perfect type of the Elizabethan gentleman at his best, with, too, his characteristic weaknesses; while the court of Denmark reveals the tendencies to decay which partly account for the Puritan reaction. Milton and Bunyan may well be treated as a contrast to Hamlet.

It may be necessary for the teacher to outline the main aspects of the Puritan movement: its protest against decaying morals, the desire for a simpler and more sincere form of worship, the political protest against unjust and illegal taxation, and the alignment of middle class against nobility and gentry. But there should be no minute constitutional study. Let the movement rather be embodied in its two chief men. The chief burden of preparation will fall upon the teacher. Masson's *Life and Times of Milton*, Mrs. Hutchinson's *Memoirs of Colonel Hutchinson*, Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*, and perhaps some such book as *The Pilgrim Fathers*, edited by John Masefield, will supply the necessary material. From the last three, at least, selections may be assigned to pupils for report. The life of Milton, unlike that of most literary men, was a life of action, and abounds in incidents where a crucial decision is to be made, and is made heroically, on high grounds. These are the points in his career that should stand out. To the teacher also must fall the task of outlining the prose writings so as to reveal their purpose, and their place in the struggle for liberty. The sonnets afford human glimpses of Milton, as does also the *Tractate on Education*; his love of social life, music, dancing, athletics, and a good dinner ought not to be left out of the student's mental picture. Bunyan, rather than Milton, is the typical, devout, almost fanatical Puritan. Fortunately he was and is so much more the man of the people than Milton that we shall not injure his popularity by giving the student the full benefit of his extreme, even morbid conscientiousness. His struggles are best portrayed in his own words.

Masson: *Life and Times of Milton*

Vol. I: "Religious Discussions in Italy," pp. 768-69

"Love for an Italian lady" (?), pp. 772-76

"Return to England," p. 764

"Cleanliness of life," p. 780

Vol. IV: "Blindness," pp. 427-32

"Two Sonnets and a Letter," pp. 439-46

Vol. V: *Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes*, pp. 573-74, 580-85, 615-16

Vol. VI: *Paradise Lost*, 465-66, 468-78

*Paradise Regained*, pp. 492-96

"Last Years," pp. 678-84

Milton: Prose (summarized very briefly by teacher):

*Divorce, Prelacy, Defense of the Regicides*

Significant quotations from *Areopagitica*

Detailed summary of *Tractate on Education*. (The class may be encouraged to compare Milton's ideas with ours.)

Sonnets I, II, XIX, XX, XXI, XXII, XXIII

Minor poems, and selections from *Paradise Lost*

Bunyan: *Grace Abounding* (Ginn edition), pp. 8-18, 38-47, 108-16

*Pilgrim's Progress* (abridgment)

Mrs. L. A. Hutchinson: *Memoirs of Colonel Hutchinson* (Everyman ed.)

Causes of the Civil War, Puritan View, pp. 66-78

Young Manhood of a Puritan, pp. 41-44

Domestic Life of the Hutchinsons, pp. 291-93

*The Pilgrim Fathers*, original narratives of the pilgrims, edited by J. Masefield (Everyman ed.)

Voyage and Landing, pp. 19-26, 37-38

Hardships, pp. 59-60, 62-66

Morton of Merry Mount and His Maypole, pp. 90-91

Roger Williams, pp. 102-7

Harvard, p. 142

Cavalier poets (best read rapidly in class without previous study):

Selections in Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* from Herrick, Lovelace, Sedley, Suckling, Wither, Carew; from Herbert and Vaughan; and, if time permits, from the Puritans—Wotton and Marvell

The literature of the eighteenth century furnishes its own best background. Addison, Pope, Steele, Swift, Johnson, Goldsmith, present a more vivid picture than anyone else can present for them; so does Franklin; so do Burns and Wordsworth. The best procedure is to plunge into their writings without preliminaries. Only in the case of the orators is a word of explanation necessary. Pitt

and Burke speak from a viewpoint quite unfamiliar, and not understood. If we are to read from their work, it will be necessary to lay a foundation of facts concerning English political ideas at the time of the Revolution.

Pope: "Rape of the Lock" (To be read rapidly, in class, not to lose the effervescence which is its chief charm. If it cannot be so read, it is best omitted.)

*The Spectator*: No. 1, "His Account of Himself"; No. 2, "The Club"; No. 34, "A Club Debate"; No. 108, "Will Wimble"; No. 20, "The Starers"; No. 41, "The Picts and the British"; No. 80, "Phyllis and Brunetta"; No. 275, "Dissection of a Beau's Head"; No. 281, "Dissection of a Coquette's Heart"; No. 324, "The Mohocks"; No. 332, "The Sweaters"; No. 330, "Letters from Two Boys"; No. 251, "London Cries"; No. 477, "Gardens"; No. 159, "The Vision of Mirza"; No. 465, "Meditation on Faith"; and many others—chosen by the teacher, or the pupils, or both

Swift: *Meditation on a Broomstick*; *A Short View of the State of Ireland*; *A Modest Proposal*

Goldsmith: "The Man in Black" from *The Citizen of the World*

Johnson: "Employments of a Housewife in the Country" and "The Scholar's Complaint of His Own Bashfulness," both from *The Rambler*

Franklin: "The Whistle," "Dialogue with the Gout," and chapters from his *Autobiography*, assigned to individuals for report.

Orators:

Burke: *Conciliation with America* (a selection, only)

Pitt: *The American War*

Henry: *On the Resolutions before the Virginia Assembly*

Adams: *Independence Day Speech*

Let the class compare the English ideas of the colonies and colonial relations with the aspirations of the colonists. Samuel Adams particularly emphasizes the differences in culture and aim of the two countries. The facts of the peculiar condition of the representative system in England at that time are definitely set forth in Howard's *Preliminaries of the Revolution*.

The teacher should also be fortified by the reading of half a dozen contemporary novels and biographies: *Tom Jones*, *Clarissa Harlowe*, *Vicar of Wakefield*, and *Evelina*; Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, Burns's *Letters*, Wordsworth's *Prelude* make a good list. Macaulay's famous third chapter of the *History of England*, Volume I, and Thackeray's *English Humorists* and *The Four Georges* may be added.



The beginnings of the Romantic movement may be represented by Burns's *Cotter's Saturday Night*, Gray's *Elegy*, Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*, and perhaps Collins' *Ode to Evening*. A day each is sufficient for these poems; if the comparative method is adopted the students readily grasp what is happening to the Pope-Addison view of life and poetry.

The nineteenth century is in many respects the most difficult to deal with in a course of this sort. It lies nearest us in time, and since we teachers were brought up on it, we are prone to imagine that it still represents the world's thought, whereas it is rather farther away from the spirit of our time, the students' time, than the fourteenth or the sixteenth century. Moreover, the mass of material is so great that it is unwieldy. The most satisfactory method of handling this period I have yet found is to select and group the readings, not by author, or by contemporaneousness, but around some central thought, carrying the study down into the present, just so far as the available supply of books will permit. Our local library system permits us to withdraw collections from the public shelves to be circulated through the school library, and by adding to these a considerable number of magazine selections, rebound pamphlet-wise from one's own stores, it is possible to get a good deal of reading done. Of course the assignments must be individual to a considerable extent, and the recitation hour becomes an occasion for reports and informal discussion; but this is an advantage.

It is well to prepare for this century rather carefully, if we are to envisage it as an epoch. A day or two may be given to black-board outlines and chronologies. It would be a serious mistake, of course, to present these to be memorized. We should understand that they are a road map, not the journey.

Main features of the nineteenth century:

In England, solid, gradual advance in social and political reform

In Europe, wave after wave of political revolution

In America, expansion westward, preserving the pioneer point of view and delaying the Industrial Revolution; the Civil War

Scientific discoveries and mechanical inventions

I. Reforms, in England:

Abolition of the slave trade, 1807

Reduction of death penalties, 1823

Catholic emancipation, 1828  
 First Reform Bill, 1832  
 Abolition of slavery (in colonies), 1833  
 Factory Acts, 1833  
 Education Act, 1833  
 Repeal of Corn Laws, 1846  
 Ten Hours' Law, 1847  
 Second Reform Bill, 1867  
 Civil Service, 1870  
 Irish Land Act, 1870  
 Education Act, 1879  
 Employers' liability laws, 1880-97  
 Allotment and small holdings acts, 1882 ff.  
 Third Reform Bill, 1884  
 Local Government Act, 1888

## II. Revolutions:

1817-21, Independence of Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Venezuela, Colombia,  
     Ecuador, Mexico; Monroe Doctrine  
 1830, Revolution in France  
     Belgium separates from Holland  
     Revolts in Papal States, Poland, German states (some of the German  
     states getting constitutions)  
     Greece freed from Turkey (Byron's death, 1824)  
 1848, Second French Republic  
     Germany—semblance of a constitution  
     Austria—Kossuth's uprising crushed  
     Italy—Constitution for Piedmont  
 1858-70  
     Russian serfs emancipated  
     Abolition of slavery in U.S.  
     Italy freed from Austria, the Papal and other autocracies and united  
     under constitutional king  
     France—the present republic

## III. American expansion

1803, the Louisiana Purchase  
 1844, Texas  
 1848, Mexican territory and Oregon  
 1867, Alaska

## IV. Scientific discoveries and inventions:

Science: Darwin's theory of evolution, 1859  
     Pasteur's germ theory of medicine, 1852 ff.  
     Anaesthetics (chloroform), 1847

**Invention:**

Let the class make an impromptu list of the mechanical invention since 1800

The factory system of industry

After a day or so spent in looking at these outlines, one should proceed to embody the main features of the period in human lives. Each teacher must choose for himself the appealing personalities, and decide whether a series of assignments and reports, or condensed, vivid accounts by the teacher will best accomplish the purpose. My favorite group is as follows: for the England of the nineteenth century, Gladstone, in most respects a typical figure, whose long life covers most of the century; for the successive revolutions, Garibaldi, who was active in many of them, on both continents, and the romantic hero of the period; for the scientific advance, Pasteur, who fought a long and bitter battle for recognition, and revolutionized medical method; for America, Lincoln. There are excellent biographies of these men available for the teacher: *Life of Gladstone*, Justin McCarthy; *Garibaldi and the Defense of Rome*, *Garibaldi and the Thousand*, *Garibaldi and the Making of Italy*, G. M. Trevelyan; *Pasteur*, M. Vallerey-Radot; *Life of Lincoln*, Herndon and Weik; *Life and Times of Lincoln*, Nicolay and Hay; and a condensation of the *Life* by J. G. Nicolay.

When the main features of the background have been emphasized, the reading follows. It is often a good plan to assign a considerable bulk of poetry, or prose, one relatively brief selection for intensive study, and the rest for cursory reading. This helps to check hasty generalizing, and gives some practice in the kind of reading most of us do for enjoyment merely. It pays to give a definite topic to be worked out through the intensive assignment: What is Carlyle's idea of a perfect government? How are the chief magistrates to be chosen? Is his plan practicable? What work does Ruskin include under productive labor? Do you agree with his classification? Just what is the proper office of poetry according to Shelley? Keats? etc.

**The Common People:**

Wordsworth: "Michael"

Lowell: "The Courtin,"

Whittier: "Snowbound," "Among the Hills," etc.

Whitman: "Song of Myself"—selections; *Drum Taps*

Individual assignments of a volume of Riley, Service, Kipling, Masfield, Gibson, Carleton, Daly, Drummond, Dunbar, Frost, Masters; comparisons with those poems the whole class have read.

#### The Workman and His Work:

Wordsworth: "The Reverie of Poor Susan," "Simon Lee," "The Last of the Flock"

Bryant: "The Song of the Sower"

Longfellow: "The Building of the Ship"

Whittier: "Songs of Labor"

Markham: "Man with the Hoe," "The Man under the Stone," "The Rockbreaker"

Rice: "A Worker Out of Work"

Gibson: "Mates," "The Furnace," "Summer Dawn"

Masfield: *Story of a Round House*

#### Nature and Philosophy:

Wordsworth: "To a Cuckoo," "To a Green Linnet," "The Solitary Reaper," "Lines Written in Early Spring," the Lucy poems, "Tintern Abbey"

Byron: *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*—selections; "The Prisoner of Chillon"

Shelley: "Ode to a Skylark," "Ode to the West Wind," "The Sensitive Plant," "Arethusa," "The Cloud," "Lines Written in the Euganean Hills," ("Mask of Anarchy,"—the "Song to the Men of England")

Keats: "La Belle Dame sans Merci," "Ode to a Grecian Urn"

Tennyson: "The Palace of Art," "The Lady of Shalott" (compare these with Keats); "Ulysses"

Browning: "Rabbi Ben Ezra"

Swinburne: "Spring Chorus from Atalanta in Calydon," "Eve of Revolution," "A Watch in the Night," "A Marching Song," "The Pilgrims"

Longfellow: "The Legend Beautiful," "The Quadroon Girl"

Lowell: "The Shepherd of King Admetus," "The Falcon," "Beaver Brook," "The Present Crisis"

Lanier: "Song of the Chattahoochee"

Whitman: "Pioneers, O Pioneers"

Moody: "Gloucester Moors," "The Brute"

Carpenter: "Sunday Morning after Church"

Noyes: "The Winepress"

#### Essays:

Carlyle: from *Heroes and Hero Worship*, "The Hero as a King"

Ruskin: from *Crown of Wild Olive*, "Work"

Emerson: "Compensation"

Articles selected for their timeliness from current magazines: *The Atlantic Monthly*, *North American Review*, *Century*, *Nation*, etc.

Lamb: "Dissertation on Roast Pig," "Old China," "Dream Children"

Stevenson: "An Apology for Idlers," "The Lantern Bearers," "Walking Tours"

Holmes: from the *Autocrat* the chapter on the three Thomases and the three Johns

Thoreau: from *Walden*, "Brute Neighbors," "Winter Animals," "The Village"

Sharp: "The Wild Mother" from *Where Rolls the Oregon*

Beebe: *Jungle Peace*, any essay

Benson's selections from *The Thread of Gold*

As for fiction, the lack of time forces it out of the survey course into the home-reading list. There it can occupy the field in competition with the modern drama. There is an added gain, in that more and more varied fiction will be read under this plan than would be the case were it crowded into the daily recitation; moreover the modern novel can be more profitably discussed in conferences than in class, especially as there are great variations in the maturity and ability of the students.

Altogether, in this plan about three weeks of the year have been devoted to strictly historical material; the remainder of the time goes to literature, which, however, in addition to its own individual message, contributes to round out the student's social picture of each epoch.